DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 196 792 SO 013 080

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TITLE Evaluation Capacity-Building in Social Work: A Comparison of Professional Education and In-Service Training.
PUB DATE Nov 80
NOTE 22p.: Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Evaluation Research Society (Washington, DC, November 19-22, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; Evaluation Methods; Higher Education; *Inservice Education; *Professional Training; *Program Evaluation; *Social Work

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relative impact of a professional education program compared to an inservice training program for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of social work. There is controversy regarding the appropriate place of professional education and inservice training in program evaluation capacity building. Advocacy for inservice training is sometimes associated with a perspective that evaluation is a job, while advocacy for formal training is more closely tied to the view of evaluation as a profession. Capacity building is operationally defined in two respects: (1) the student or trainee's perception of increased capability or confidence in performing evaluation tasks, both managerial and technical, and (2) the student or trainee's later involvement in agency evaluation activities. Questionnaires were sent to two groups: the first group were graduates of the masters program at Syracuse University School of Social Work and the second group had undergone inservice evaluation training by the New York State Department of Social Services. The Syracuse graduates praised the blend of administrative and casework practice skills in their curriculum. In comparison, the workshop participants said that their evaluation training was most instructive at the on-site training sessions but that too much knowledge was presented too fast and the material tended to go over their heads. The Syracuse graduates expressed high self-confidence in their capability of designing and implementing data collection instruments and their ability to apply statistics using computer statistical packages. In contrast, the workshop participants said their stronger confidence was in taking on the tasks of organizing an evaluation study, defining the evaluation question, interpreting the findings, and writing the evaluation report. They saw the technical areas of instrument design, sampling, and statistics as problem areas for which they would seek assistance from specialists. Regarding their present evaluation activities, the variations in degree and kind of involvement for both graduates and workshop trainees was large. (Author/RM)

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EVALUATION CAPACITY-BUILDING IN SOCIAL WORK:

A COMPARISON OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING

SP 013 080

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Paper presented to the Evaluation Research Society Annual Meeting
Washington, DC November, 19-22, 1980

The interest in program evaluation capacity-building for human service agencies can be traced to federal legislation of the 1970's that encouraged state and local governments to take more control over the planning, management and evaluation of programs. General revenue sharing, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, Title XX Amendments to the Social Security Act, and the Community Mental Health Centers Amendments of 1975 are examples of federal programs that mandated funded agencies to assume the responsibility of measuring and reporting the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided.

Although these federal programs appropriated funds for technical assistance, training and program evaluation expenditures as a percentage of agency project budgets, there was, at first, no evaluation or planning mechanism in place for agencies to plug into their operations. As Weiss observed in 1973, project evaluation staffs were highly unstable. Turnover of evaluators was high, there were few professional incentives for practitioner involvement, and research consultants played a major but not totally satisfactory role. Wholey (1970) noted that program managers had difficulty recruiting university researchers because of the poor image of federal program evaluation. And Lynn (1973) pointed out that program managers who contracted with research and development, or management consultant firms often reported difficulties in guiding and directing the contract.

Given this situation the evaluation profession focused its attention to a systematic effort of developing and implementing program evaluation capacity-building strategies. Looking at efforts over the last five years two professional development strategies have predominated. First, is the development of graduate professional degree programs in evaluation.

Specialized training programs emerged from university departments representative of most traditional and applied social and behavioral science disciplines, and in some cases the programs were interdisciplinary in structure. In social work graduate education, evaluation training was incorporated into the curriculum largely to prepare social workers as "consumers" of evaluation research (Zimbalist, 1974); but there are now examples of MSW programs with evaluation as a special concentration intended to prepare social workers as "producers" of evaluation in addition to their skills as practitioners (Koroloff, 1979). Interestingly, the present capacity of some public and private social work agencies to conduct evaluations is built on university-agency cooperative arrangements where MSW students required to complete an independent research project choose to help an agency collect evaluation data and prepare a written report of findings and recommendations (Beck, 1979; Chenault and Burnford, 1978).

The second major strategy for program evaluation capacity-building is the development of in-service training programs and special workshops. Within this training strategy two types of programs have appeared. First are the continuing education seminars or workshops open to all professional evaluators and intended to offer technical instruction in evaluation methodology and discussion of contemporary issues (Wright, 1977). Second are the agency or program specific in-service training programs designed to equip in-house evaluators with research skills that apply directly to the agency's evaluation objectives and that are appropriate to its client information systems (Cohen, and others, 1979).

The need for these short-term training programs is based on the assertion that professional graduate education programs are necessary for preparation of

evaluators with the essential technical and managerial skills, but by themselves they are insufficient for meeting the immediate training needs of practicing in-house evaluators and meeting the need of program managers for formative evaluation skills.

However, the appropriate place of professional education and in-service training in program evaluation capacity-building is not without controversy. Anderson and Ball (1978), in their discussion of evaluation training issues, point out that advocacy for in-service training is sometimes associated with a perspective that evaluation is a "job"; while advocacy for formal training is more closely tied to the view of evaluation as a "profession". The opposing positions on this issue are examplified by the assertion of Brogan and Greenberg (1973:77) that continuing education is no substitute for "the discipline and vigor of a full educational program," and in contrast by the assertion of McCullough (1975:263) that "a full educational program cannot be substituted for a timely and problem-specific learning experience in the field."

The purpose of this paper is to look at the relative impact of a professional education program compared to an in-service training program for evaluation capacity-building of social workers. For this analysis, capacity building is operationally defined in two respects: 1) the student or trainees perception of increased capability or confidence in performing evaluation tasks, both managerial and technical, and 2) the student or trainees later involvement in agency evaluation activities, that is, the agency's utilization of new staff evaluation capabilities. Results of a post-graduation and post-training questionnaire survey are presented comparing student and trainee response to questions about their evaluation skills, their present evaluation activities, and their evaluation of the training itself. Before preceding with the results, it is important to describe both programs.

Masters of Social Work Evaluation training

The research component of the masters program at Syracuse University School of Social Work basically consists of: 1) prerequisites in undergraduate research methods and statistics for matriculation, 2) completion of an evaluation research course in the first year of study, and 3) completion of an independent study project and participation in an evaluation research practicum in the second year. Students who select the health care concentration take an additional graduate level statistics course. Also, students in the health care concentration have the opportunity to earn a Masters in Public Administration from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs in addition to the MSW. Admission to the MPA program is separate and students complete the core course requirements of both programs; 15 credit hours are jointly applied to both degrees. At the Maxwell School students receive related evaluation training in courses on legislative and policy analysis, public budgeting, and health economics and planning.[1]

The main objective of the first year MSW evaluation course is to provide students with a literature background knowledge of basic evaluation concepts of design, measurement, data collection and analysis and to inform them of ethical, administrative, and contextual issues of evaluation in human service agencies. A review of statistics commonly used in evaluation studies is included along with an introduction to the University's computing center and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) programming. To facilitate the second year independent study project, students are assigned the course requirement of drafting a research proposal to conduct an evaluation or needs

[1]For more information contact Dr. Claire Rudolph, Health Studies Program, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13210.

assessment study in an agency willing and interested in such a project. Generally, students develop ideas for evaluation studies in the agency of their field placement. Otherwise, students become involved with agencies who request graduate student help in conducting studies through contacts with the faculty of the school.

Having an independent study proposal in hand at the beginning of the second year, most students start implementation of their study in the fall semester, completing data colection and analysis by the end of March, and submitting a final report to the agency and the faculty by graduation day. The student receives tutorial assistance from a faculty advisor throughout the year. The purpose of the evaluation research practicum is to provide students with special technical instruction sessions in skilled areas of measurement, questionnaire design, computer programming. Also, several informal social gatherings are held where students relate to each other their "war stories" of conducting evaluation studies. Last, students have the opportunity to present their evaluation project findings at a yearly school sponsored colloquium of social work research open to the community and generally well-attended by the local agency directors, admininstrators, supervisors, and caseworkers.

Agency In-Service Evaluation Training

In 1979 the New York State Department of Social Services initiated a statewide evaluation training project to build the capacity of county social service department staff to evaluate Title XX social services. The Maxwell Human Services Management Program of Syracuse University designed an in-service training program, called the Evaluation Workshops, to provide county social service department administrators and supervisors with both classroom instruction and direct experience in designing and conducting an evaluation study.[2]

[2]To obtain a more detailed description of the workshops write to Dr. Paul L. Johnson, Maxwell Human Services Management Program, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13210.

The participants from three nearby counties attended six workshop sessions at Syracuse University and received six additional training sessions held on-site in each county both scheduled over a six month time period. In conjuction with the training sessions each county group of participants first formed a research team and selected a social service program for evaluation. They then proceeded to define evaluation questions, select a design, collect and analyze agency data, and finally prepare an evaluation report. One county completed a case record review of foster care services; another chose to evaluate a preventive services program for families by reviewing case records and interviewing caseworkers; and the third county focused their evaluation effort on documenting the effectiveness of a parent aide program.

The training objectives for county evaluation capacity building were twofold. The first was capacity building in the form of team building--that is, to assist county participants in working together as a team in completing an evaluation study. The training activities involved advising and assisting the team members in reaching decisions about evaluation questions, definitions of service goals and objectives, data collection instruments and sampling, a delegation of tasks for collecting and analyzing data, and writing final reports. In all three county teams, a division of labor and specialization of tasks occurred among its members, some choosing to coordinate the various tasks, others interested in specific phases of the study--data collection, statistical analysis, or report writing. Some of the participants chose to play a non-active or observing role, but they eventually dropped out of the training program. Among those participants who played an active role in one or more of the tasks it was evident by the end of the study that a degree of group solidarity had been achieved.

The second major training objective of these workshops was to build evaluation capacity on the individual level. All participants were provided at the Syracuse Workshops sessions with instruction in the basic concepts of evaluation research design, measurement, and data collection, and were given an orientation to the role of evaluation in human services. Furthermore, lecture presentations to the participants on the more technical subjects of measurement, statistics, and report writing were designed to help them in fulfilling their specific tasks or responsibilities as members of the evaluation team.

Method

The post-training followup questionnaire was chosen as the principal method for assessing the capacity-building goal of the professional education and the inservice training programs.[3] To a total of 36 MSW/MPA graduates of June 1979 and 1980, questionnaires were mailed in early September inquiring about: 1) their agency of current employment, 2) their position(s), 3) their involvement in administrative, planning, evaluation and casework activities, and 4) their opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the program. The questionnaire largely employed the open-response format for the purpose of obtaining as rich as possible descriptive data on the students' perceptions and experiences since graduation. By the first of November a 61% (N=22) response rate had been achieved. The availability of the graduates' current addresses favored those students who had remained in the local community and other parts of the state, thus representing one possible response bias.

[3] Copies of these questionnaires can be obtained by writing to the author.

A similar questionnaire was mailed in late September to all twenty-eight participants of the Evaluation Workshops in-service training program. For this group the response rate by November first was a disappointing 39% (N=11). To supplement this weak data, telephone interviews with selected participants from each of the three county agencies were conducted. This method proved helpful not only for gaining insight on the capacity-building question but uncovered one reason for the poor response rate, that is, participants had voiced objection to a post-test knowledge instrument included for other training evaluation purposes. This is a cautionary tale to other evaluators of training programs.

Two limitations of this questionnaire method should be pointed out. First, the overall question responses were most likely biased toward a favorable perception of both programs. Anonymity by place and possibly name was not completely assured with the mailed questionnaire, thus the more disaffected or dissatisfied were least likely to respond. Second, the estimates of how much or how often graduates and trainees are being utilized for their evaluation skills may be artifically low because the time frame for the followup was premature. Because of these two limitations, the analysis of question responses was focused more on the variation of descriptive statements rather than aggregate numbers.

Comparison of Graduate and Workshop Questionnaires

The question responses of the MSW graduates and the Evaluation Workshop participants can be compared in three respects, 1) evaluation of training curriculum and format 2) self-perceptions of evaluation skills, and 3) present involvement in evaluation activities.

First, the written comments, criticisms and suggestions of both graduates and workshop participants about the evaluation curriculum and instructional

methods were most helpful for the continuing development of each program. The dual MSW and MPA graduates praised the blend of administrative and casework practice skills in their curriculum. They cited the relevancy of the planning, evaluation, policy and organizational theory components of their coursework. Several students said that the course in grant writing skills they took had immediate application in their work. The MSW students were positive about the evaluation research experience they had with the independent study project, but they would have liked more training in psychpathology, counseling, and direct service knowledge. One criticism of their formal statistics training was that it was limited in practical application to evaluation data.

In comparison, the workshop participants assessed their evaluation training as most instructive at the on-site training sessions but less effective at the Syracuse Workshops. There was too much knowledge presented too fast and the material tended to go over their heads. The participants were complimentary about the first few Syracuse sessions on defining evaluation questions and setting goals and objectives, but the technical sessions on design, measurement and analysis were rated as more difficult to understand.

The strengths and weaknesses of each program, pointed out by the graduates and workshop participants, are corroborated by their perceptions of self-confidence in performing various evaluation tasks. The MSW and MPA graduates expressed high self-confidence in their capability of designing and implementing data collection instruments and their ability to apply statistics using computer statistical packages. In contrast, the workshop participants said their stronger confidence was in taking on the tasks of organizing an

evaluation study, defining the evaluation question, interpreting the findings, and writing the evaluation report. It was the technical areas of instrument design, sampling and statistics which they said they would most likely seek assistance from specialists to complete the task. The contrasting pattern of responses here suggests that the professional education program in this case is very successful in building the technical skills necessary for evaluators while the in-service training program is most successful in the management tasks of evaluators. This conclusion is addressed in the discussion section of this paper.

Last in this comparison is the graduates and workshop participants current involvement in evaluation activities. Slightly over half of the responding graduates (12 of 22) indicated an involvement in research activities, but the variation in degree and kind of involvement was large. The degree of involvement varied from overseer of evaluation activity as a part of administrative duties, to participation on an evaluation project team, to sole responsibility for design, implementation and analysis of an evaluation project. Several graduates said that their skills were being utilized for needs assessment and resource analysis data collection efforts as part of the agency's social services planning program. The reason cited by several graduates indicating no involvement in evaluation activities was that their agency had placed them in direct service positions with such high caseloads that it was impossible to find time for initiating or participating in evaluation projects.

For the workshop participants and their reported current involvement in evaluation activities there was variation in overall responses between three counties as well as variation in responses within each county. In one county

six of the original ten participants decided to continue working as a team and to expand their evaluation study by collecting additional data for a larger sample of clients. The idea occurred to them to use the original survey data on active clients as baseline data for a followup survey one year later. Another county, following the Evaluation Workshops, hired a Ph.D. social scientist for a full-time position as coordinator of planning and evaluation. In conversation with this individual, it was learned that he planned to organize an evaluation study of another Title XX agency service bringing together several members of the original workshop team. Participants from the third county indicated that another evaluation study was not being planned or organized at the time of the survey. One reason citied for the lack of continuing evaluation activity was that agency implementation of a state management information system was occupying the worktime of original team members.

Implications For Evaluation Training

The findings of this comparison of social work, professional education and in-service training in evaluation has implications for several issues about overall trends in evaluation training, which have been raised by others. First is the issue of whether the multidisciplinary background and character of the profession will diminish as specialized training programs graduate professional evaluators (Flaherty and Morell, 1978). Next is a related concern about the impact of specialized training programs on the evaluation profession and its claim of exclusive competence to produce high quality evaluations (Morell and Flaherty, 1978). And third, is the prediction by Connor and Dickman (1979) that we will see a decrease in the heterogeneity of training program types and formats as professional education programs in

evaluation become more established. The point of this discussion is to argue that these trends and issues are not unfolding exactly as predicted and that some opposite trends can be forecasted.

First, Flaherty and Morell predicted in 1978 that the multidisciplinary character of professional evaluators, as reflected in their basic training from the various traditional social science backgrounds, will become less visible as the graduates of specialized evaluation training programs play a more predominant role in the activities of the profession. Although these new graduates will receive their training from departments of different disciplines, their common training in evaluation skills and professional issues will transcend the substantive knowledge base of each discipline.

This paper which is concerned with the development of evaluation training in the social work profession can conclude that there are several evaluation methods and issues unique in both relevance and application to social casework practice and these stand out alone in the social work evaluation training curriculum in comparison with other disciplines. For example, single sample methodology, agency accountability systems, and developmental compared with evaluative approaches (Reid, 1979) are topics seldom found in mental health training program curriculums. (Hargreaves and others, 1978; Franco and DeBlassie, 1979).

Further evidence of the present multidisciplinary character of evaluators can be seen by informally content analyzing the training activities described for each professional education program listed in the recent Directory of Evaluation Training (Evaluation Research Society, 1980). There is substantial

variation not only among the approximate thirteen different disciplines represented, but also within the two most predominant disciplines of psychology and education. While it is possible to identify a common core curriculum running through most programs, there remains a unique body of evaluation skills and issues claimed by each discipline. Furthermore, the multidisciplinary character will most likely remain because the research methods of a specific social science discipline are so often closely tied, if not completely derived, from the dominant philosophical paradigms and theoretical perspectives of the discipline.

The second issue concerns the relationship between specialized training programs and the profession's claim to an exclusive capability for high quality evaluations (Morell and Flaherty, 1978). This interprofessional battle will be fought more often than not by the graduates of evaluation training programs who will be competing with the "old guard" evaluators of traditional discipline training.

However, there is another dimension to this problem of exclusivity that applies to graduates of specific practice degree programs (e.g. social work, public administration, public and mental health, education). They may be battling this issue on the intraprofessional level, that is, only social workers with special evaluation training are competent to assume agency evaluation responsibilities.

The intraprofessional dimension of the exclusivity issue may be the more salient issue as more evaluators receive training within a human service practice degree program. We may see a specific kind of vertical differentiation of evaluation competencies where educational degrees (doctorate, master's, baccalaureate) define various levels of exclusive

ability to perform different evaluation tasks. Morell and Flaherty (1978) have noted how this has occurred in the case of a civil service track for program evaluators in mental health. A similar differentiation has been proposed for various degrees in social work with the Ph.D designated the capability for initiating and conducting social work research and evaluation and the MSW relegated to the role of team participant (Slavin and Perlmutter, 1978). Thus, we may see specialized evaluation training expanding horizontally by more extensive coverage in various human service professional degree programs but also differentiating itself vertically by specifying levels of evaluation competence according to educational degree.

The phenomenon of vertical differentiation in evaluation training has profound implications if one also examines its potential at the agency or organizational level. Here the tasks and responsibilities of conducting an evaluation study may be hierarchically ordered and divided among members of a team rather than given the exclusive domain of a single professional evaluator. The team organizational model for conducting evaluations (Fairweather and Tornatzky, 1977) basically differentiates three types of team roles: 1) the "management function" of planning and organizing the study and utilizing its results, 2) the "technical function" of designing data collection instruments, drawing samples, applying statistics and writing reports, and 3) the "participant function" of providing substantive input to program goals and objectives and the interpretation of evaluation results. Any division of labor like this for in-house type evaluations will certainly challenge the graduates of specialized evaluation training programs to any exclusive claim of competency to perform all three functions. In this situation the professionally trained evaluator may be typecast within the

organization as only a technical specialist for evaluation.

Certainly the tenuousness of the evaluators' role in the agency organization is nothing new. The profession-oriented literature has tried to help out the evaluator on a number of specific issues, such as, utilization of evaluation results (Davis and Salasin, 1975; Patton, 1978; Rothman, 1980), planning evaluations systems (Nicolas, 1979; Nance and Pillsbury, 1976; Rutman, 1980; Wholey, 1979), and, change agent tactics (Morell, 1979; Fleisher, 1980). Overall, evaluators are becoming more like administrators and managers in order to avoid being too narrowly defined in the tasks of the evaluation process.

The vertical differentiation problem for professionally trained evaluators also poses an interesting spin-off question for future trends in evaluation training with respect to program formats and targeted groups of professionals. Two years ago Connor and Dickman (1979: 107) observed that:

> Many different varieties of evaluation training exist, from formal graduate programs to more formal wokshops and in-service training sessions. At this early stage in the development of evaluation research, the heterogeneity in training opportunities has resulted from the absence of formal, accessible training programs. As information about training programs is disseminated to potential users and assimilated by training personnel, the heterogeneity of programs will decrease, with the more formal

training programs becoming more firmly established. While this paper cannot offer any quantitative evidence to verify or nullify this prediction, Connor and Dickman are probably correct that workshops and in-service training programs to provide evaluators with technical skills are decreasing in numbers. However, this prediction may not hold true in the case of in-service training programs designed specifically for agency executives and program managers to provide them with the management skills necessary for planning,

organizing and utilizing evaluation studies. These programs will develop in response to those who see evaluation training for administrators as helpful to professional evaluators in conducting studies (Beigel and Levenson, 1978; Broskowski and others, 1979; McCullough, 1975), but also to those who argue that evaluation is one of the major domains of an administrator's role (Prigmore and Atherton, 1979). That administrators are interested in managing the evaluation activities of their organization is evident from several examples of literature providing guidelines to them in developing program evaluation capability (Davis, Windle and Sharfstein 1977), in organizing staff and consultants for evaluations (Tripoli, Fellin, and Epstein, 1978) and in outlining the essential administrative tasks of evaluation (Biggerstaff, 1977). In this respect, human service executives, administrators and managers are trying to become more like professional evaluators.

In a similiar vein, we are likely to see more evaluation in-service training programs designed specificially for human service practitioners. These programs may be of two types. First is training for the purpose of developing the practitioner's role as a participant in agency evaluation activities, something which Wildavsky (1972) advocates as essential for the "self-evaluating organization". And second is technical training for practitioners in clinical practice evaluation methods, such as the single-subject designs and goal attainment scaling. (Wodarski, Hudson, and Buckholdt, 1976).

This paper's comparison of professional education and in-service training programs for social workers suggests a trend of role or function specific evaluation training for administrators, evaluators and practitioners. In this case, the professional education program was most successful in building the

technical competencies of evaluators, while the in-service program had its greatest strength in building the management and participant skills of human service administrators and practitioners. That all three groups --administrators, evaluators, and practitioners --should receive evaluation training is not likely to be disputed, but the appropriate mix of evaluation management, technical, and participant skills for each group will most likely be a future topic of discussion.

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